

## **Paranormal Competition?**

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Recently, on a national radio interview, the host asked me “How do you feel about the competition in the paranormal field?” Initially, I really wasn’t sure how to answer his inquiry. My first inclination was to ask “what competition?” To our knowledge, there is no other group with the equipment, resources, and sheer amount of data collected that we at ARPAST have. As the interview went on, I continued to reflect upon the question, and began to realize that, like the skin of an onion, there are many layers to be revealed.

By its very nature, the word “competition” denotes both a winner and a loser. According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, competition is defined as:

1: the act or process of competing: rivalry: as a: the effort of two or more parties acting independently to secure the business of a third party by offering the most favorable terms b: active demand by two or more organisms or kinds of organisms for some environmental resource in short supply

2: a contest between rivals; also: one's competitors <faced tough competition>

To delve deeper into the initial inquiry one must look introspectively, and ask, “What are my goals?” Personally, my primary goal, and the principal reason behind why I organized ARPAST, was to discover the answer to the age-old question of “what happens when we die?” As I grow older, awareness of my own mortality has driven me to seek the answer.

The quest for this answer has been occurring in one form or fashion since the Spiritualist movement of the 1840’s. Traditionally, the use of psychics, seers, clairvoyants, and other metaphysical modalities have been the tools du jour. As a scientist, I demand hard, quantifiable data – not simply the subjective “maybes” provided by such flawed means. As society progresses, so too do our technologies. I truly believe that we are on the cusp of discovering the answers we seek due to the utilization of these new tools and technologies. How can we possibly find solid, incontrovertible answers using any other means?

With the glut of paranormal programming available on television today, is it any wonder that new groups seem to pop up faster than weeds? If I remove my rose-colored ARPAST glasses, and examine the websites of many of the other paranormal groups in existence, I find an extremely wide disparity of goals, objectives, and methodologies. From “ghost hunting” groups which utilize investigations as strictly weekend social affairs, to those who try to “outdo” each other in the hopes of scoring the next big TV show... to those who truly want to

help in our common goal, but, lack the equipment, training, and resources to be contributing effectively.

And to think, some folks have actually asked why we loudly proclaim that we are not a “ghost hunting” group! To this I respond that ARPAST has chosen to take the higher road – we actively avoid other organizations that have shown themselves to have less than ideal reputations or intentions. We choose to work with very few, select organizations.

The latest “trend” in the community seems to be a push for harmony and accord. I keep seeing sites with “Paranormal Unity” plastered all over them. Is that to remind the owners what they should be doing? I find it ironic that many of these groups espousing unity are the very ones to be avoided due to their drama and antics. I think the concept of “unity” is an excellent one in theory – however, logistics and reality seem to be at odds with one another.

So, back to the question of competition. Why do groups have to be in competition with one another? Why can't we all work collectively towards the common goal of finding the answers to the questions we seek? Why must there be so much drama, backstabbing, badmouthing, and negativity? One thing is for certain – all of the nonsense and banter only serves to further drive a wedge between acceptance of our field – both within the scientific community, as well as the general populace. Regardless of our intentions, technology, and amount of data collected, without acceptance, we are no closer now than we were 160+ years ago.

We do not need a “winner” or a “loser” in this field. We need scientifically quantifiable answers. We need a concerted effort from those serious about researching paranormal and anomalous phenomena. Don't worry about competing with one another. My challenge to the paranormal community: focus on practicing the golden rule.

*"Do not do to others what would anger you if done to you by others."  
(Isocrates)*

About the author:

Larry Flaxman is the founder and President of ARPAST ([www.arpast.org](http://www.arpast.org)) – the Arkansas Paranormal and Anomalous Studies Team, which is a member of the TAPS (The Atlantic Paranormal Society) family. He has been actively involved in paranormal research and investigation for over ten years, and melds his technical, scientific, and investigatory backgrounds together for no-nonsense, scientifically objective explanations regarding a variety of anomalous phenomena. Larry has appeared in numerous newspaper, magazine, radio, and television interviews, and has authored several published articles regarding science and the paranormal. Larry is also co-authoring a series of books with Marie D. Jones, author of "PSlence" and "Supervolcano," starting with "11:11- The Time Prompt Phenomenon: The Meaning Behind Mysterious Signs, Sequences and Synchronicities," due for release in February 2009 by New Page Books.

In addition to involvement with ARPAST, he serves as technical advisor to several paranormal research groups throughout the country.